Story at-a-glance

- During the winter months, heaters and cold temperatures may lead to dry air with low humidity, leading to dry skin, irritated sinuses and throat, and itchy eyes
- Exposure to low humidity can dry out and inflame the mucous membrane lining your respiratory tract, increasing your risk of colds, the flu, and other infections
- Flu viruses survive longer, and spread more easily, when humidity levels are low
- A hygrometer, which you can find at most hardware stores, can measure the amount of moisture in your home's air so you can adjust it accordingly
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By Dr. Mercola

Humidity, or the amount of water vapor in the air, is an important health variable that is easy to overlook… yet very easy to remedy. Ideal humidity is generally described as between 40 percent and 60 percent, although some experts believe it should be closer to 35-45 percent. (SPADINA TOWERS is often at 10-20% for sustained periods).

When humidity is higher than this, as is common in the summer, it can contribute to the growth of mold, dust mites, and fungus, making it particularly dangerous for people with asthma and allergies. Low humidity is equally dangerous, however, and may even lead to serious complications to your health.

Low Humidity: Watching Out for This Common Winter Danger

During the winter months, heaters and cold temperatures may lead to dry air with low humidity. This dry air can lead to dry skin, irritated sinuses and throat, and itchy eyes.

Over time, exposure to low humidity can dry out and inflame the mucous membrane lining your respiratory tract. When this natural barrier is no longer working properly, it increases your risk of colds, the flu, and other infections. Further, in low humidity certain viruses may be able to survive longer, further increasing your risk of contracting an infection.

For instance, one study found that flu viruses survive longer, and spread more easily, when humidity levels are low.[1] Nasal congestion may also be related to the temperature and humidity of inhaled air -- perhaps more than any other variable, according to one study.[2]

The authors of the study suggested that the interaction between temperature and humidity influence "nasal cooling" as the air moves through your nasal cavity. This nasal cooling is detected by "sensors" inside your nose, which stimulate the sensation of airflow being either easy or obstructed, with cooler air resulting in feelings of less obstruction.

While high humidity can trigger nasal congestion, *very dry* air (i.e. low humidity) is *also* known to increase feelings of congestion because drying out your sinus membranes can irritate them further. So depending on your individual circumstances, if the air in your home is excessively dry, then *increasing* the humidity may help.

Low Humidity May Also Damage Your Eyes and Skin

If you struggle with dry, irritated eyes, low humidity could be a factor since it is known to increase the evaporation of tears. This may disrupt the moisture balance necessary for a healthy, comfortable eye surface.[3]

Reduced humidity combined with colder temperatures tends to wreak havoc on your skin as well. Many suffer with dry, scaly, itchy skin during winter months even if they don't have a diagnosable skin problem like eczema.

This is commonly referred to as "winter itch," caused when your skin is depleted of moisture. Aside from the itching, dry air will draw moisture out of your skin, making small cracks on your skin's surface far more likely.

While it's rare for infectious agents on your skin to cause a problem (it is typically only an issue when you transfer that to your nose or mouth), cracked skin will increase your risk of getting sick by providing an entryway for potentially dangerous pathogens through the cracked skin.

This is especially true in the winter and in dry environments where humidity levels frequently drop below 10 percent. According to research published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*,[4] maintaining the proper humidity levels may help to lower rates of respiratory infections and allergies:

"The majority of adverse health effects caused by relative humidity would be minimized by maintaining indoor levels between 40 and 60%. This would require humidification during winter in areas with cold winter climates. Humidification should preferably use evaporative or steam humidifiers, as cool mist humidifiers can disseminate aerosols contaminated with allergens."

Dry Air? How to Increase Humidity

If the air in your home is excessively dry, you're likely experiencing dry skin or a dry, scratchy throat. You may also have noticed your houseplants drying out, wallpaper peeling at the edges, or static electricity, which is a direct result of dry air.

If you have hardwood floors or wooden furniture, low humidity can cause them to lose moisture and contract, leading to cracks or separations at the seams. It should be mentioned that while low humidity is most common in the winter, it can also occur in dry, arid environments or during the summer due to excessive air conditioning. To increase humidity, you can:

- Use a vaporizer or humidifier
- Create a steam bath by taking a hot shower, or filling your sink with hot water, then placing a towel over your head as you lean over the sink
- Breathe in the steam from a hot cup of tea
- Boil water on your stove or simply place bowls of water around your home

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According to Dr. Robert Ivker, D.O., former President of the American Holistic Medical Association, the ideal level of relative humidity for sinus health is between 35-45 percent. This level is also generally recommended to avoid mold damage in your home.

As far as using a humidifier goes, you'll also need to make sure you clean it often, at least once every three days using hydrogen peroxide to remove any film or mineral deposits. The water in the reservoir should be changed daily, and be sure the area around it (tabletops, windows, carpeting, curtains, etc.) are kept dry. If you have a central air heating system, the best humidifier is one that is built directly over your furnace and tied into a humidistat and water source so the entire process is automated and your home is evenly humidified.

As per the direction of Tom McClocklin Sr., the centralized humidification that served the building for more than 30 years, was removed from service at the time of installation of a new heating system in “in order to save money”. He does not live in the building. Meanwhile our residents suffer the consequences.

The cost to have installed new centralized humidification at that time was approximately $500 per residential unit. Portable humidifiers require two plus units per condominium and require constant refilling and cleaning. For the health safety and convenience of residents, centralizied humidification should be returned to SPADINA TOWERS immediately.